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Split

Higher Education QA Trends in the Eastern European Region CEENQA's contribution to INQAAHE II Global Study

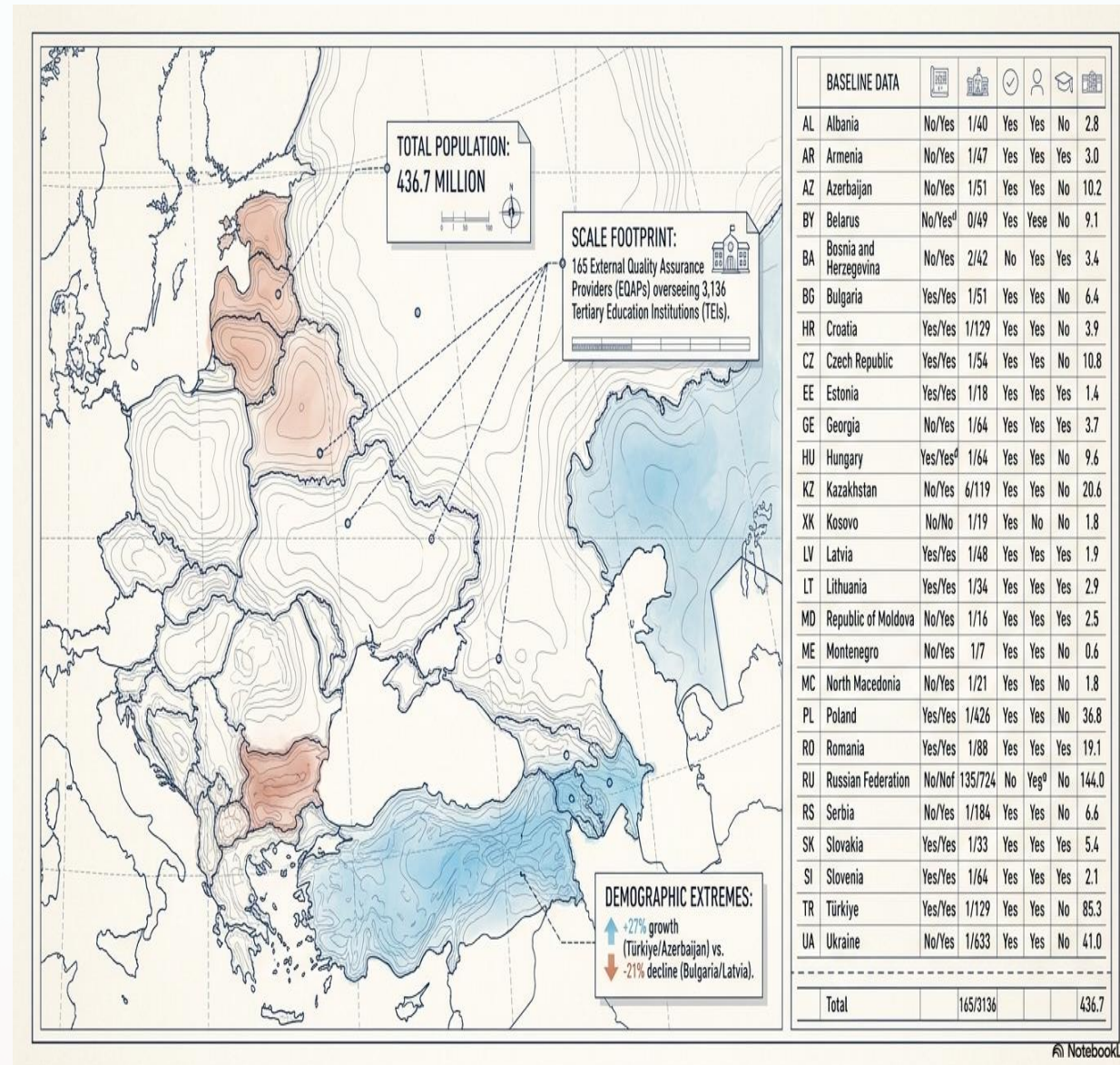
dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković-Jurković



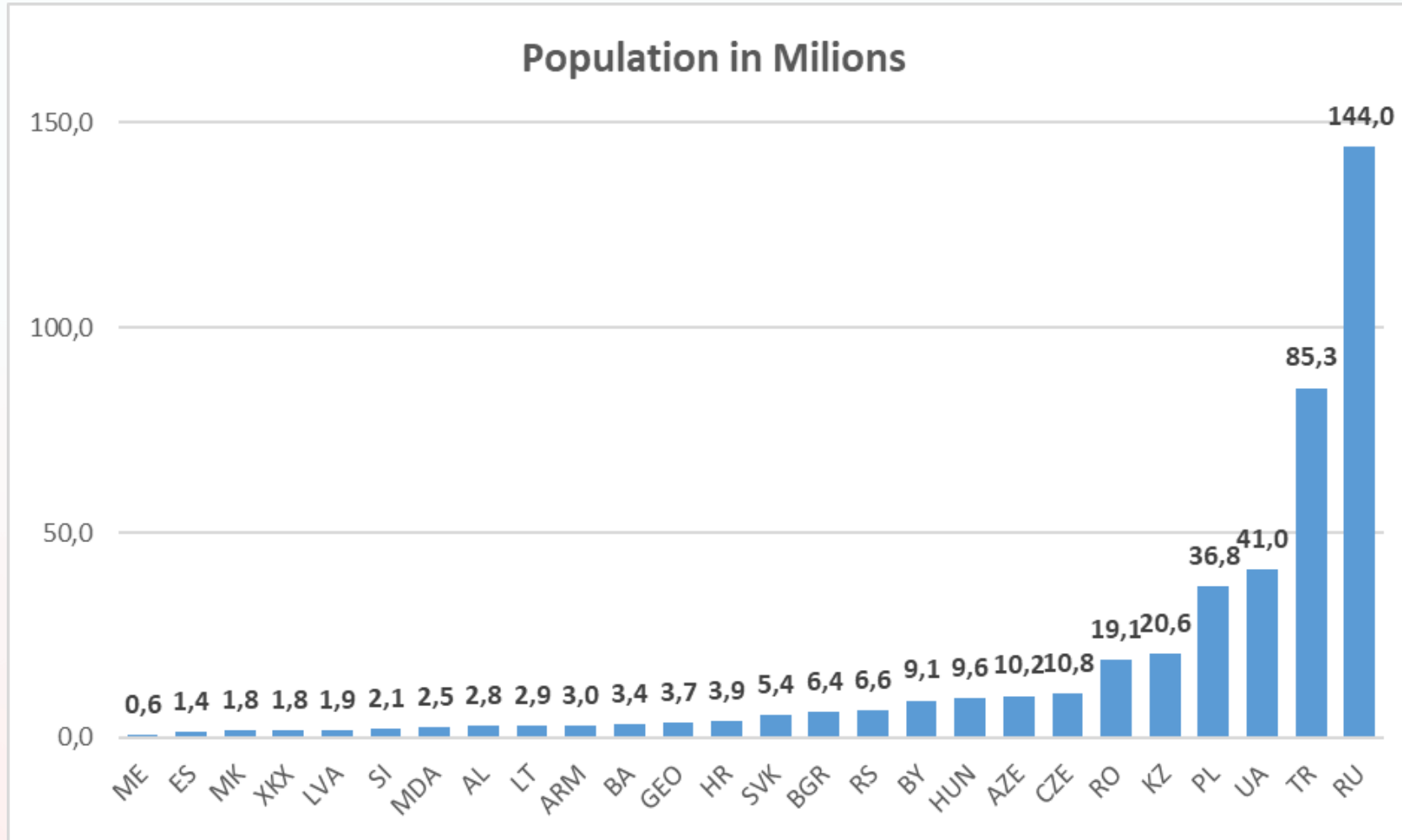
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External Quality Assurance
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Eastern European Region

- **26 countries** (variation between EU members (11), candidate states (8), other countries)
- **Highly diverse landscape: politically, economically, technologically, socially, culturally**
- **Challenges: COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, the migration crisis, increase of the cost of living, climate emergency impact on HE sector**
- **Mobility of students and staff, mental health issues, green economy and resilience, research agenda, digitalisation**
- **Differences in institutional autonomy, academic freedom, demographic trends**
- **EU policies and participation in EHEA integration as a major driver**



Population scale – 436.7 million people



Demographic shifts

Severe Population Decline (2000–2023)

- Bulgaria & Latvia (-21%)
- Lithuania (-19%)
- Romania (-15%)
- Croatia (-14%)
- Serbia (-12%)

Impact: Drives pressure for institutional consolidation and fierce competition for a shrinking student pool.

Population Growth (2000–2023)

- Azerbaijan & Türkiye (+27%)
- Slovenia (+7%)
- Czech Republic (+5%)

Impact: Strains existing institutional infrastructure and demands rapid expansion of quality-assured programs.

Methodology

- Literature Review
- Surveys (developed by INQAAHE working group; September 2023 – February 2024)

Group	Population	Sample	Number of countries	% Response	Sample Error
EQAPs	35*	26	26	74.28%	16.80%
TEIs	2363*	288	24	12.19%	3.78%

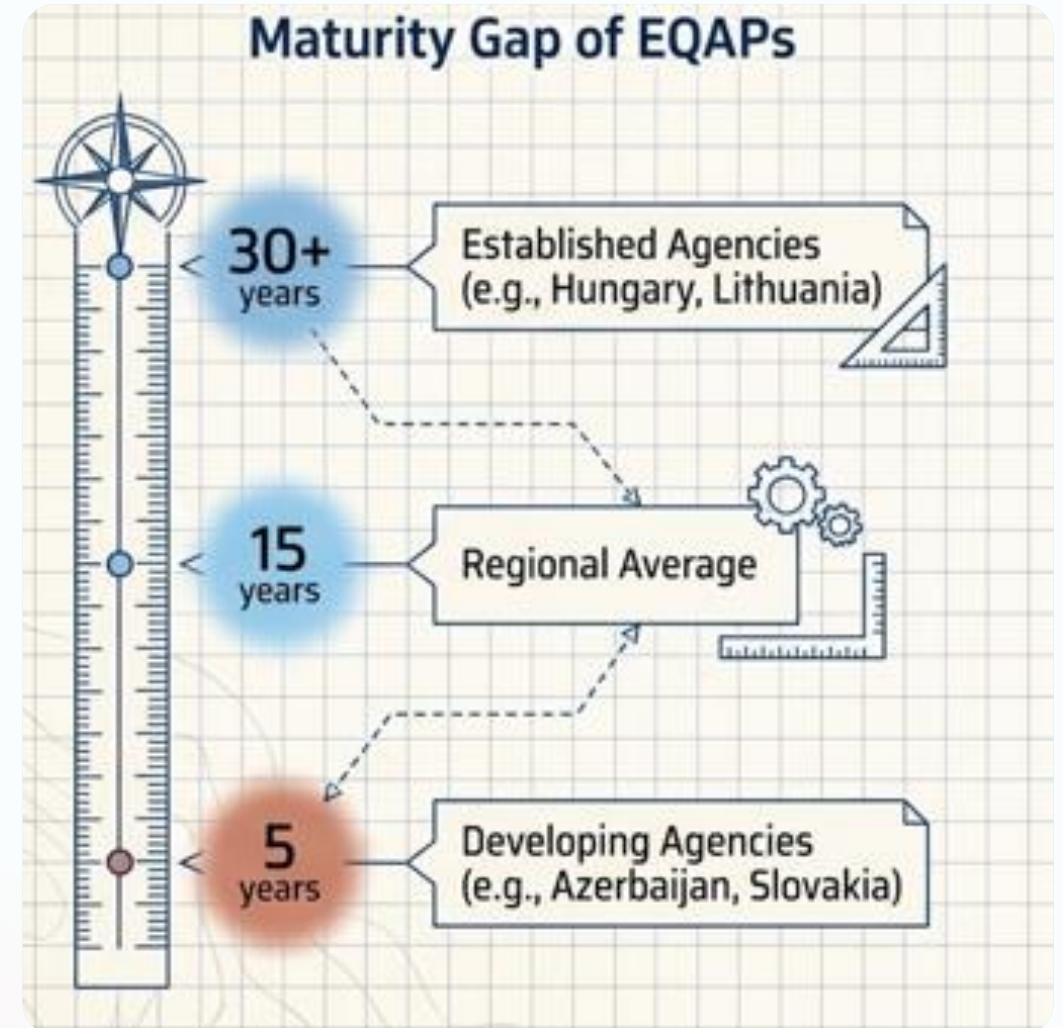
- Focus groups (6 - 3 include 29 TEIs (HEIs) representatives across 23 countries
3 include 25 representatives from 20 EQAPs across 19 countries)
- Analytical context

Eastern European Region in the EHEA

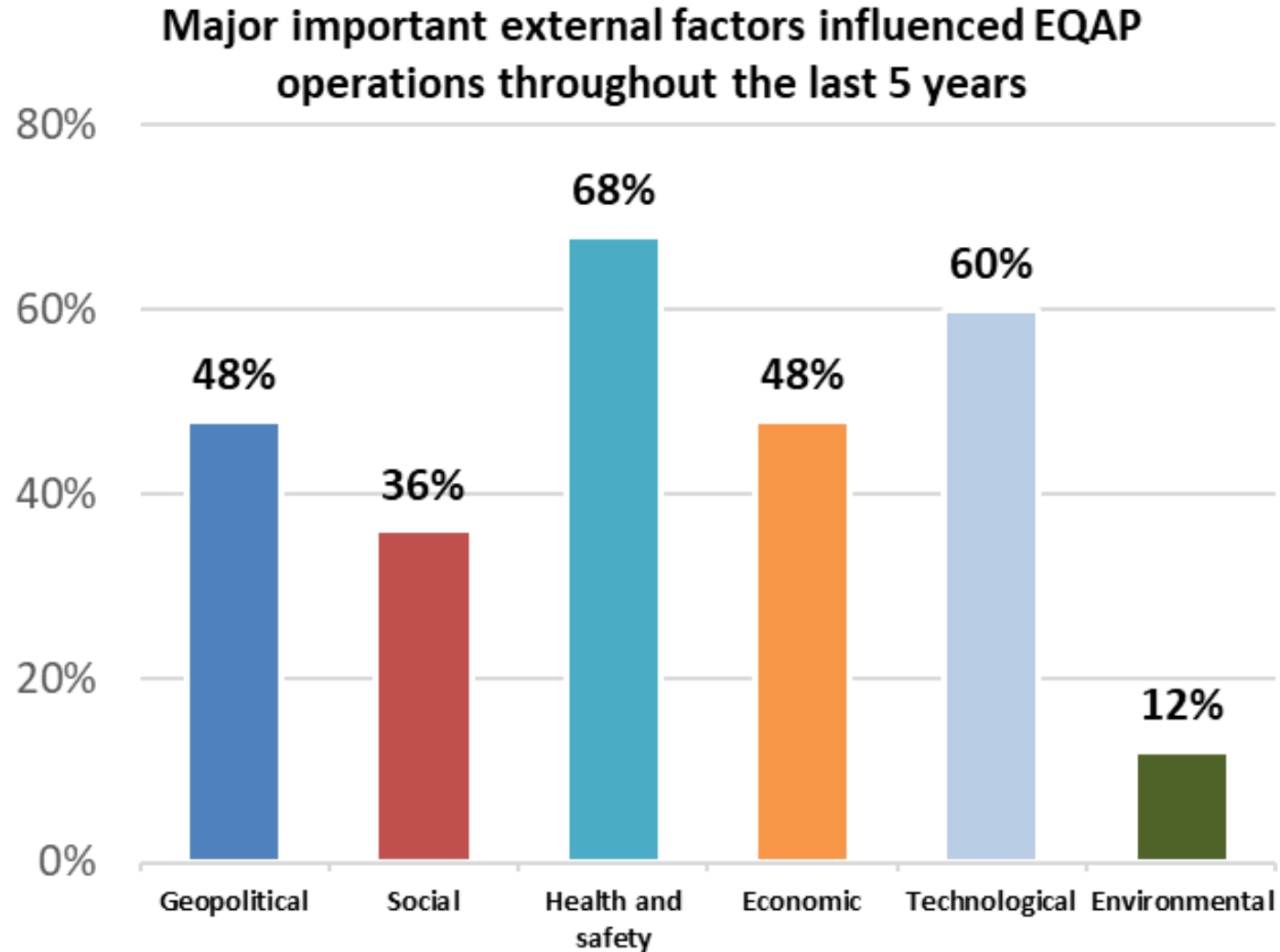
- **26 countries**
- **3 136 HEIs** (TEIs)
- **165 QAAs** (EQAPs /Russia 135 EQAPs)
- **All countries** have established National Qualifications Frameworks (**NQFs**) except for Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **All countries** ratify **the Lisbon Recognition Convention** except Kosovo
- **UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education** ratified by 8 countries (Armenia, Belarus, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia)

History of accession to EHEA

- **Goal:** Enhancing HE, improving teaching and learning
- Past: External evaluations based on various methods and standards
- Bologna declaration → HE systems' reforms → harmonization
- European model of QA → ESG
- Significant differences in the experience and maturity of external QA
- 23 countries, at least 1 national



External challenges – quick responses to risk



Compliance with ESG – credibility & trust

External evaluations

HEIs

EUA

EURASHE

QAAs

Respondents:

**24 members/affiliates of
ENQA**

22 members of CEENQA

20 members of INQAAHE

7 members of APQN

7 recognized by WFME

3 members of ECA

2 members of ENAEE

EQAR (2010/11; 2021)

16 QAAs from EER

**46% of countries lack a
national agency
operating in
substantial compliance
with ESG**

**2020 Rome Ministerial
Communique**

Compliance with ESG

- Substantial compliance with all ESG:
HAKA and SQAA
- All QAAs comply with ESG 2.2 and 3.2
- Improvement areas:
 - ✓ ESG 3.3 Independence 9/16 PC
 - ✓ ESG 2.6 Reporting 5/16 PC
 - ✓ ESG 3.5 Resources

Independence of EQAPs

Levels of Independence in Key Functions:

Defining Quality and Policies:

- Fully Independent: 57.69%
- Quasi-Independent: 38.46%
- Other: 3.85%

Defining Procedures:

Fully Independent: 69.23%

Quasi-Independent: 19.23%

Developing Standards:

Fully Independent: 73.08%

Quasi-Independent: 19.23%

Recruitment of External Reviewers:

- Fully Independent: 100%

Review Panel Setup and Report Publication:

- Fully Independent: 96.15%

Final Decision-Making on Quality Matters:

- Fully Independent: 88.46%
- Quasi-Independent: 3.85%
- Funder has final say: 7.69%

Decision-Making Authority Distribution:

- Most authority on staffing, organizational, and financial decisions is held by the Executive Director.

ESG 3.5 – Human and Financial Resources in QA Agencies

Key Challenges

- Limited human and financial resources
- High staff turnover and uncompetitive public-sector salaries
- Dependence on ministries affecting agency independence
- Insufficient staff training and professional development
- Limited capacity for thematic analyses and long-term sustainability

Recommendations for Improvement

- Develop clear long-term staff development plans
- Strengthen staff competence through training, mobility and peer learning
- Diversify funding sources and explore international partnerships/projects
- **Improve staff retention through fair, transparent and sustainable HR policies**

ENQA & CEENQA Support

ENQA Staff Development Group (2012–2016) created:

- **Competence framework for QA professionals (2014)**
- Guidance for recruitment, job design and staff development

Continued support through:

- CEENQA Staff exchange programmes
- ENQA Leadership Development Programme (since 2018)

Funding

Public Investment in Higher Education

- EE countries invest less in HE than the EHEA average
- EHEA median public spending

in 2020: 1% of GDP

(in 2015: 1.5% of GDP)

Spending per Student

EHEA median in 2020:

8,065 EUR per student;

(6,890 EUR per student in 2015)

ESU Position on Education Funding

- Education should be treated as a **public and shared good**
- ESU supports increased public investment in education
- Recommends at least **2% of GDP dedicated to higher education**
- Warns that education is often underfunded and vulnerable to budget cuts

Funding of QA Agencies

- Around **50% of QA agencies** rely primarily on state budgets
- **38% of agencies** generate significant income through external evaluations
- Donations are not a common funding source in Eastern European countries
- **Main Message**

Sustainable and increased public investment is essential for strengthening higher education systems and ensuring the long-term effectiveness and independence of QA agencies.

Stakeholders engagement

Stakeholders Most Frequently Involved

AREA OF INVOLVEMENT	MAIN STAKEHOLDERS
Defining quality & procedures	Public TEIs (88.5%), Government (84.6%), Students & Private TEIs (76.9%)
Development of standards	Public & Private TEIs and Students (80.8%)
Development of procedures	Public & Private TEIs and Invited Experts (65.4%)
Reviewer panels	Students (96.1%), Employers (88.5%), Invited Experts (84.6%)
Decision-making bodies	Students (92.3%), Public TEIs (80.8%), Employers (76.9%)
Governing boards	Public TEIs (80.8%), Employers & Students (73.1%)

Stakeholders engagement

Key Findings

- ✓ Students are among the most actively engaged stakeholders across all QA processes
- ✓ Public and private HEIs play a central role in standards and procedure development
- ✓ Employers and professional associations are strongly represented in review and governance structures
- ✓ Alumni, labour unions and funding bodies have comparatively limited involvement

Main Message

EQAPs demonstrate increasing stakeholder participation, but the level of engagement differs significantly across stakeholder groups and organizational functions.

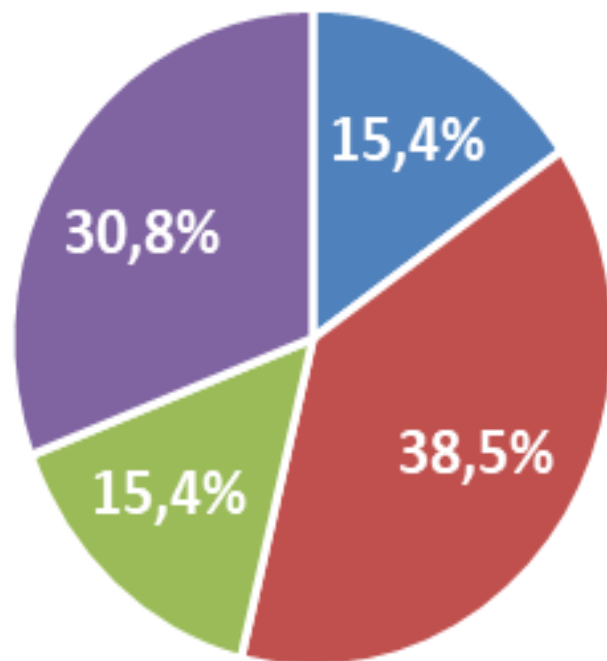
Trends

- Changing approaches to external QA
 - ✓ Shifting from programme to institutional evaluation (empower institutions, more strategic QA, building quality culture)
 - ✓ Moving from institutional to programme evaluation (improving relevance, accountability and educational quality)
- Using standards: **generic 96%**, **specific to discipline 35%**, **others 12%**
- Updating standards: **as needed 64%**, **every 3-5 years 20%**, **every 5-7 years 16%**

QA activities - typical steps

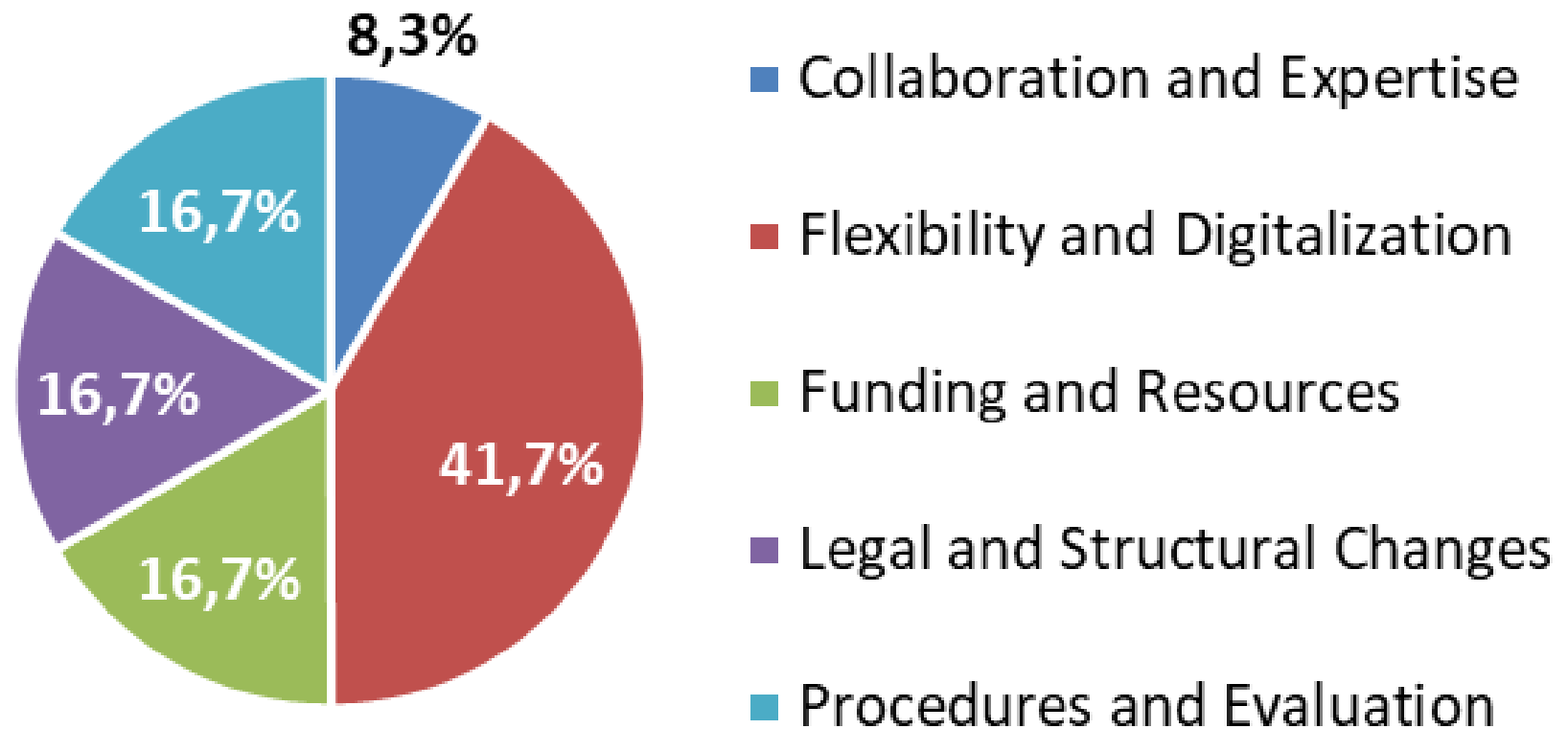
- Self-assessment done by the applicant 100%
- Technical review by the EQAP designated staff 80%
- Desk-review by external review panel 76%
- Site-visit by external review panel 100%
- Decision-making by the designated body 96%
- Follow-up actions 96%.

The major challenges experienced by EQAPs while using the current standards



- Digitalization and Complexity
- Expertise and Resources
- Internationalization and Collaboration
- Standards and Procedures

Three things to be changed to make the EQAP's QA system more relevant to the context



Importance of IQA in maintaining excellence in TEIs

- **HEIs profile:**

- ✓ Fewer than 5000 students 67%
- ✓ More than 30 000 students 2%

- **FTE academic staff:**

- ✓ Fewer than 100 (35%)
- ✓ Between 101 and 500 (41%)
- ✓ Between 501 and 1 000 (16%)
- ✓ More than 1000 (8%)

- **Funding:**

- ✓ By governments: 29%
- ✓ Public funds: 48%
- ✓ Private with public functions: 14%
- ✓ Private for-profit 6%

- **Internationalisation:**

- ✓ Carry out programmes only in the country where are legally based (66%)
- ✓ Jointly with local institution abroad (18%)
- ✓ Branch campus (3%)

- **HEIs operating abroad:**

- ✓ operate in 1 country (73%)
- ✓ 2-5 countries (18%)
- ✓ 94% deliver fewer than 25% of their programmes internationally

- **Definition of quality:**

- ✓ Excellence (44%)
- ✓ Fitness for purpose (40%)
- ✓ Transformation (33%)
- ✓ Value for money (10%)

HEIs Internal QA

- **IQA**

- ✓ Responsibility of HEIs - ESG
- ✓ Policies, structures, processes and mechanisms
- ✓ Monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching, learning, research and overall academic performance

- **Established:**

- ✓ Over 10 years ago (60%)
- ✓ Between 5 and 10 years ago (23%)
- ✓ The others more recently
- ✓ Not having IQA System (2%)
- ✓ Implemented across HEI, bachelor's and master's programmes (75%)
- ✓ At PhD programmes (47%)

- **IQA units:**

- ✓ Centralised at institutional level
- ✓ Report directly to president/rector (51%)
- ✓ Governance board (26%)
- ✓ No specific budget line for IQA unit 64%
- ✓ Sufficient resources to work effectively

Internal QA systems are under development

- **Regularly update policies and procedures (52%)**
- Policies and procedures **are fully implemented** in the following areas: **research performance and productivity, T&L environments, student support services, public information provision, community engagement (37%-45%)**
- Internal QA of cross-border education → less than 20% HEIs have policies and procedures and actively apply them
- Stakeholder involvement; faculty & students - strong, external stakeholders - room for improvement
- IQA recommendations are thoroughly followed up 65%
- Only prioritised recommendations are followed up 12%

Experience with external QA

- **All TEIs** are evaluated externally at institutional level **by national QA bodies**, (90% periodically within a 5-year period) and **at programme level (80%)**
- Evaluated by international regulators 21%
- Main improvements:
 - ✓ Design, approval, monitoring and review of the programmes (47%)
 - ✓ Internal QA at programme level (37%)
 - ✓ Research productivity (27%)
 - ✓ Teaching methods (19%)
- **Findings indicate progress** but further work is needed to enhance the integration and transparency of IQA systems

Trends in Digital Transformation

- **Move Towards Paperless Offices:**

- ✓ Digital storage
- ✓ E-signatures
- ✓ E-governance tools

- **Interoperability Efforts**

- ✓ **Connections Established:** National registers integration
- ✓ **EU Involvement - Erasmus+ Projects**
Interoperability - 18 EQAPs submitted
27 108 QA reports as of July 2025 to DEQAR.

- **Emerging Technologies in QA**


- **AI Tools:**
 - ✓ Self-assessment report production.
 - ✓ Thematic analysis
- **Blockchain:** Exploring issuances of diplomas and credential recognition.

Digitalisation - Conclusion

- **Critical Concerns:** Ethical use and security of digital tools in QA processes.
- **Legislative Framework:** Recent EU acts (2014, 2024) focus on data flow and human verification in decisions.

Conclusions

- EER countries are **younger democracies**
- **Investment in tertiary education is lower** than in Western European countries
- **46% of countries in Eastern Europe do not have a national agency listed in EQAR**
- **Increased stakeholders' trust in QA agencies'** processes and procedures
- In terms of **efficiency**, **digitalisation is evolving** and influences the reduction of the burden on TEIs as well as the development process of agencies.
- In terms of **relevance**, the vast majority of Eastern European countries have clear goals **to develop external QA systems fully aligned with the ESG.**
- In terms of **transformative power**, the development of QA has been raising awareness that **all stakeholders are responsible for QA**, with emphasis on the role and responsibility of management, senior leadership of TEIs and public authorities.

Thank you for 
your attention!
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